

Wilder Ranch - Horse Barn  
1401 Coast Road  
Santa Cruz  
Santa Cruz County  
California

HABS No. CA-2274-A

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Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

WILDER RANCH - HORSE BARN

HABS No. CA-2274-A

Location: 1401 Coast Road, Santa Cruz County, California; two miles north of Santa Cruz on the coast side of State Highway 1.

Present Owner/Occupant: State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation

Present Use: This building is part of a 22-acre cultural preserve at Wilder Ranch State Park where dairying and ranch life along California's coast is interpreted.

Significance: Wilder Ranch State Park's ranch buildings, while representative of rural vernacular architecture, reflect a century of traditions associated with innovative and progressive dairy ranching in California. Wilder and four succeeding generations of his family were quick to adopt the newly developed cream-separator, and the majority of the machinery was water powered using a Pelton wheel and a belt-drive system, including the electrification of the dairy in the 1890s. In the 1930s the emphasis at the ranch shifted from milk to beef stock, as well as thoroughbred horses and artichoke production.

The architecture of the Horse Barn is unique because there appears to be no other horse barn of its type constructed in the region, and perhaps California, during this period.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1892-96, based upon E.S. Harrison's description and photographs of the ranch in 1892, and those of Isabel Raymond in 1896.
2. Architect: Unknown, though this building may have been designed by the local architect, Edward Van Cleeck, who designed the Melvin Wilder House, another building on the property constructed in 1897.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The history of Wilder Ranch can be traced back to California's Mexican period. Once known as Rancho Refugio, in 1836 the land was granted by the Mexican government to the three Castro sisters: Candida, Jacinta and Maria de Los Angeles Castro. Candida had married Joseph Bolcoff, a naturalized Mexican citizen of Russian-Siberian birth. Bolcoff's name is not mentioned in the original grant, but he took control of Rancho Refugio in 1849-50. Bolcoff hoped to disenfranchise Jacinta and Maria in order to clear the claims of Joseph "Jose" Majors, who had married Maria in 1839. Majors had been selling Rancho Refugio property which he did not own since 1848.

Bolcoff sold "undivided interests" in parcels of Refugio to Moses A.

Meder (often spelled Meader in public records) from 1850 to 1856. Meder bought and sold parcels, and brought his son-in-law, Thomas B. Hart, into the arrangement. Upon Bolcoff's death, under tremendous legal pressure, his sons sold all their rights to a Charles E. Norton. By that time, perhaps twenty persons, companies, and law firms held claims against Rancho Refugio.

In 1866, Moses A. Meder, et. al, took Norton to court to prove their claims on the lower two-thirds of Rancho Refugio. Norton claimed an undivided interest from the Bolcoff estate. Meder represented Samuel Adams, Albion P. Jordan, Isaac E. Davis, Robert F. Peckham, Adna A. Hecox, Thomas Courtis, Maria O. de Cadiz, Santa Cruz Petroleum Oil Works Company, Richard F. Ryan, George Pace, Richard W. Linton, George Parsons, Manuel L. Brockelbank, W.W. Broughton, Henry Rice, Joaquin R. Majors, George Caldwell, David Caldwell, Daniel Caldwell, R.E. Merrill, E. Bender, and Henry Ryan. A master counsellor appointed by the court reported that none of the above were bona fide purchasers, but that Meder did legally own a two-thirds interest in his purchase as well as Jordan and Davis; and that Thomas Courtis did, in good faith, give a quit claim to Santa Cruz Petroleum Oil Works, but that he did not legally own the full undivided interest that he sold or transferred.

By the late 1860s, the courts were untangling enough of the legal mess of the eastern two-thirds of Rancho Refugio to allow John T. Fairbanks of Sonoma County and Richard H. Hall to begin buying up claims against the property. In 1870, Fairbanks and Hall were able to acquire all of Meder's various claims upon the ranch, plus other leases and liens, including what is now the area of the cultural preserve. Hall then sold his entire interest to Fairbanks. In May 1871, Fairbanks sold his interest to Levi K. Baldwin of Santa Cruz and Deloss D. Wilder of Sonoma County. The two men established (or continued) five dairies on the property. Wilder and Baldwin's purchase encompassed well over 4,000 acres in two distinct parcels.

In 1885, Baldwin and Wilder dissolved their partnership and divided the acreage into "upper" and "lower" ranches. Wilder obtained the "lower" 2,330 acres, including the present state park cultural preserve area, for \$32,000.

The Wilder family owned the property for nearly a century until July 1969, when it was sold to the Moroto Investment Company, Ltd., a subsidiary of Sussman Properties, Ltd., of Toronto, Canada. The California State Department of Parks and Recreation acquired the cultural preserve area, along with the beaches, coastal benchlands, and uplands of Wilder Ranch in 1974 to establish Wilder Ranch State Park.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown, though it is probable the Wilder family and ranch employees constructed or assisted with construction of the building.

5. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings of the building have been located, though in 1896 Isabel Raymond noted that the stable could accommodate fifteen horses.
  6. Alterations and additions: The basic plans and elevations of the two-story horse barn appear to have changed very little since its construction. From time to time the Wilder family and their employees altered the configurations of the horse stalls in the horse barn to conform with animal-husbandry practices of the period. Turn buckles and cross wires were installed upstairs to prevent the barn walls from spreading outward.
- B. Historical Context: Throughout the Wilder family's occupancy of the ranch, horses were highly valued, as evidenced by the elaborate barn constructed between 1892-96. At the center of the ranch building complex, the building stabled the horses and equipment used for riding, polo, and hitching buggies. Draft animals were never kept in this building, according to the Wilders. Upstairs was used for hay storage and, on special occasions, barn dances.
- The architecture of the structure is unique. There appears to be no other horse barn of this type constructed in the region, and perhaps in California during this period. The major alterations to the building over the years appear to have been made in the stall configurations.
- Enterprise and ingenuity have marked the dairy operations at Wilder Ranch from its earliest years. All owners adapted quickly to new machinery, such as the cream-separator and the Pelton wheel, and discoveries, such as electricity, that were constantly refining and streamlining the dairy industry.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

- A. General Statement:
1. Architectural character: The unusual horse barn shows the Queen Anne influence, seen in shingled pediments, upon typical nineteenth-century or "barnyard vernacular."
  2. Condition of the fabric: Very good; the building was stabilized by the Wilder family in the 1950s with turn buckles and cross wires at cross columns on the second floor. The barn's original wood foundations and some of its siding have deteriorated over the years. Some of the original building fabric has been replaced.
- B. Description of Exterior:
1. Overall dimensions: 75'-8" x 48'-6"; from the cupola crest to the ground is about 37'.

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2. Foundations: The building is supported by piers on the southeast corner. This appears to be the original support for the structure. Newer concrete foundations are visible at the northwest corner of the building.
3. Walls: The front facade has horizontal simple drop wood siding. The boards are 9" wide with a groove of 1-1/2". The north, east, and west facades are vertical board and batten with 12" boards and 3" battens.
4. Structural system, framing: Post-and-beam construction is used on the north, east and west facades of the building. The posts are 12' on center. Studs (2" x 6") on the front of the structure extend from the ground to the gambrel roof. 2" x 12" (actual size) ceiling joists run east-west, with 2" x 3" cross bracing.
5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The front/south facade has hinged double doors on each side of the opening. Each of the four doors measures 44" x 116-1/2". Each door has three panels with decorative diagonal boards. The rear/north side has a single hinged door 40" x 77", composed of vertical boards on the ground level; a similar 46" x 72" door is located at the barn loft or second-floor level. On the north facade above the second floor door there is a 9' x 12' door that slides down. On the east facade there is a single 57" x 84" hinged door, which was used principally for animal access. An elaborate pediment with diamond shingles and dentils tops the doorway.
  - b. Windows: The front/south facade has two double-hung sash on the first-floor. To the west, the window has two vertical lights on the upper sash. The lower sash is boarded up. The window east of the door is a four-over-four-light double-hung sash. Beneath the sill is an elaborate sill trim. Two dormers are located on the front of the gambrel roof. A pair of four-light windows are located beneath each dormer pediment. East and west facade windows follow the same pattern: there are four six-light windows and two six-over-six-light double-hung sash similar to the front windows. On the rear/north facade are two single-light windows on the first floor, and on the second level are two openings the size of the six-over-six-light double-hung windows found in the rest of the barn.
6. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Gambrel roof with red composition shingles on the upper area and wood fish-scale shingles on the lower surface,

painted red.

- b. Cornice, eaves: Wood cornice and eaves. A wood gutter is located on the south facade.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Simple dormers clad with fish-scale shingles in the pediments are located on the lower facet of the gambrel roof. A continuous cupola runs the length of the barn-monitor roof. There are horizontal louvers on the east and west walls of this unit, diamond-shaped shingles on the south face, and vertical boards on the north face. A recently installed metal weather vane with a trotting horse tops the south corner of the cupola.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans:
  - a. First floor: The first floor contains three rooms located toward the front of the barn, which were used for tack and other storage. Horse stalls are located along each side of the central driveway. To the rear of the structure was a space designated for buggies and other vehicles, in addition to a buggy-washing area.
  - b. Second floor: The hayloft on the second floor extends the entire length of the building. Hay chutes are located along the east and west walls.
- 2. Stairways: A ladder stair rises from the first to the second story in the storage room, located at the southwest corner. A rear exterior ladder provides access to the sliding door on the north side of the barn.
- 3. Flooring: The first-floor 15', central driveway is macadam. On each side of the driveway a board floor composed of 1-1/2" x 6-1/2" planks runs east-west. The west side of the building's rear is dirt. The east is 2" x 12" planks. 1" x 5-1/2" boards run north-south on the second-story floor. All wood flooring is unfinished.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: The outer walls of the first floor have exposed framing members and outer siding. The interior walls are composed of 1" x 5-1/4" vertical painted boards.
- 5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Each of the three interior rooms have a hinged four-panel door. The trim around the doors is plain.

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Half-doors on the stalls with cross bracing have been altered extensively.

- b. Windows: The trim around the windows in the interior of the barn is plain.
- 6. Decorative features and trim: The stalls have elaborate arched openings and column capitals that support the arches. One of the stalls was enlarged to accommodate a buggy.
- 7. Hardware: Cast-iron hooks are located on the stall posts and tack room. A pulley-and-weight system operates the sliding door in the barn. A different pulley and rail system is located on the north side of the structure and was used for loading hay into the barn.
- 8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Lighting: Knob-and-tubewiring feature porcelain light sockets attached to the ceiling joists. Modern wiring has been added.
  - b. Plumbing: Exterior water spigots are located outside the east door and by the northeast corner of the barn.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting and orientation: The horse barn sits at the center of a T intersection formed by the main driveway and the straight east-west length of unpaved drive. It is one of three buildings facing to the south. The barn is immediately east of the shops/bunkhouse and west of the granary.
- 2. Historic landscape design: Several corrals are located immediately next to the horse barn to the north and to the east.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: None have been located.
- B. Early Views: There are several early photographic views and drawings of the ranch complex contained in the collections of the California Department of Parks and Recreation's Office of Interpretive Services in Sacramento, the California State Library, the Santa Cruz Public Library and the University of California at Santa Cruz Library. One of the earliest views of the structure is contained in a 1896 article by Isabel Raymond.
- C. Bibliography:

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- D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Nearby Santa Cruz ranchers and distant Wilder relatives, who may have photographs and other archival materials related to the Wilder Ranch, have not been contacted.

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

This project was undertaken for the California Department of Parks and Recreation by the Historic American Buildings Survey, under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief HABS/HAER Division, and Kenneth L. Anderson, chief of HABS. The survey team was composed of project supervisor Christian D. Overby (University of Kansas), and architectural technicians Alexandra Kettles (US/ICOMOS-University of Edinburgh), Shelley Milling (Mississippi State University), and Steve Eccher (University of Colorado).